

## MORDELLISTENA SECRETA HORAK (COLEOPTERA: MORDELLIDAE), A SPECIES NEW TO BRITAIN

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**Abstract.** *Mordellistena secreta* Horak is recorded from Britain for the first time. Notes are given to distinguish it from other species with which it is likely to be confused.

### INTRODUCTION

Batten (1986) in his review of British Mordellidae includes *Mordellistena pentas* Mulsant in his key as a species which might eventually be found in Britain. Amongst some Coleoptera collected by me on Epsom Common, Surrey, on 23.vi.1971 were two *Mordellistena* which I had not identified until recently. One of these was a female *M. pumila* (Gyllenhal) and the other a male, keyed out to *M. pentas* Mulsant using Batten (1986).

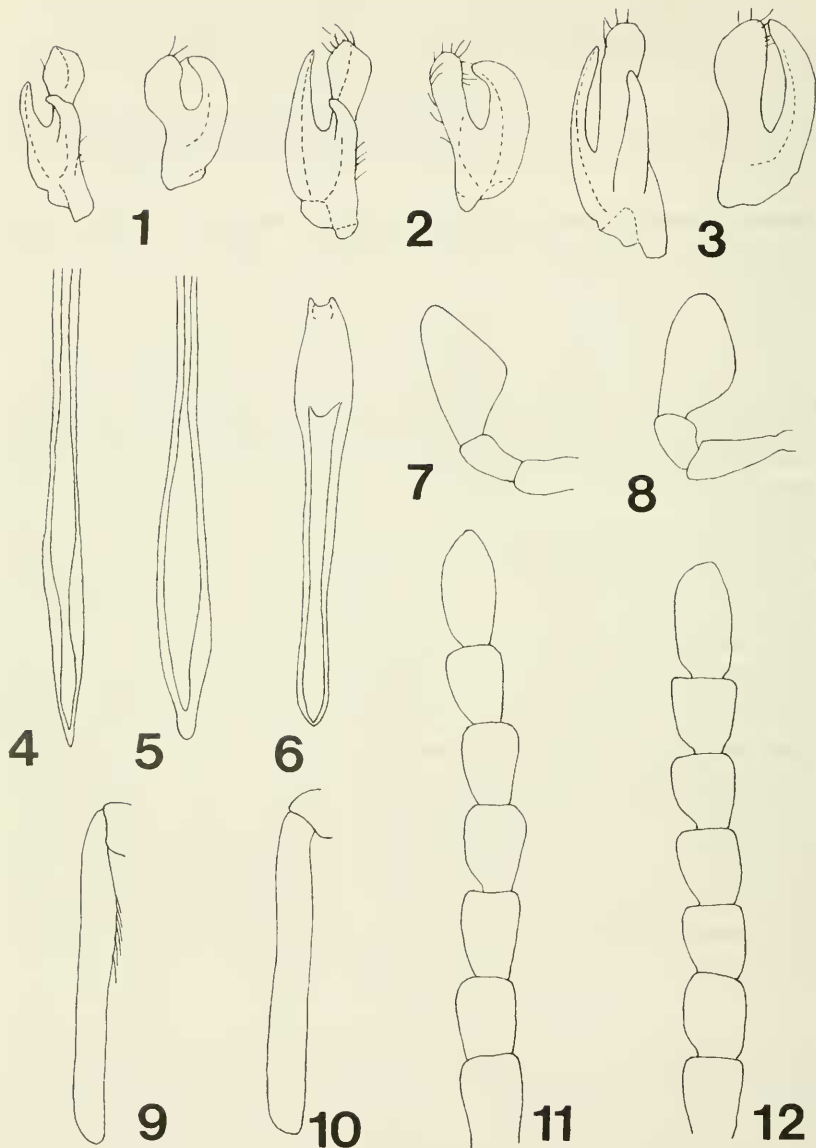
However, using Horak's (1983) key to the *pentas* species group, this specimen keyed out to *M. secreta* Horak, a species described from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and also recorded from Austria, Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Turkey, the Caucasus and Armenia, but not apparently from western Europe. I sent the specimen to Jan Horak who kindly confirmed my identification.

I was subsequently sent another male of the *pentas* species group by Daniel Hackett, collected on Hounslow Heath, London, on 3.vii.1998. The genitalia of this specimen did not match well with that of my specimen of *M. secreta*; the length to width of antennal segments 5–10 was between 1.1 and 1.3 times instead of 1.4–1.6 times as long as wide, as given for *secreta*, and the shape of the last segment of the maxillary palp was somewhat different. These characters appeared to correspond more closely with the figures and description given by Horak for *M. berbera* Horak, described from Algeria. I sent the specimen to Jan Horak who identified it as a specimen of *M. secreta*. It thus appears that *M. secreta* shows some variation in those characters used to identify the species in this group, rendering identification problematic in this difficult group. I have figured the antennae, maxillary palpi and male genitalia of the two specimens for comparison (Figs 1, 2, 4–8, 11, 12).

### IDENTIFICATION

In Batten (1986) *M. secreta* will key to *M. pentas*. *M. secreta* can be distinguished from *M. pentas* in that the males of the former species have a brush of longer protruding hairs near the base of the fore tibia on the inner part of the anterior face, which is absent in *M. pentas* (Figs 9–10). In the few specimens I have examined the elytra of the latter species is also less curved when viewed from the side. Needless to say it may not be possible to identify females unequivocally in this group.

I have figured the parameres of a specimen of *M. pentas* from Konitsa, Ioanina, Greece from my collection, that was identified by Jan Horak, in case this species should be found in Britain (Fig. 3). The figure of the parameres given in Batten (1986) which is the same as that given in Batten (1976) from a specimen from Vernet, France, and the figure in Ermisch (1969) do not agree well with the specimen I have



Figs 1-12: *Mordellistena* species. 1-3: Parameres of male. 1-2 *M. secreta*: 1 Epsom Common specimen; 2 Hounslow Heath specimen; 3 *M. pentas* from Konitsa, Greece. 4-5: Apex of penis of *M. secreta*. 4 Epsom Common specimen; 5 Hounslow heath specimen. 6: Phallobase of *M. secreta* from Hounslow Heath. 7-8: Maxillary palp of *M. secreta*. 7 Epsom Common specimen. 8 Hounslow Heath specimen. 9-10: Fore leg of male. 9 *M. secreta*. 10 *M. pentas*. 11-12: Segments 5-10 of male antennae of *M. secreta*. 11 Epsom Common specimen. 12 Hounslow Heath specimen.

figured. This could be due to individual or geographic variation, or possibly the specimens figured are another species.

The *pentas* group can be distinguished from the *pumila* group in that members of the former group have three ridges on hind tarsal segment two, whereas the latter group have only two ridges on this segment. This character can be difficult to see unless the specimens are well set. *M. secreta* in general appearance is very like the rather variable *M. pumila* (Gyllenhal) and the shape of the parameres, phallobase and the apical part of the penis are also very similar, so it is possible that *M. secreta* may well turn up amongst material standing as *M. pumila* in collections.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

***Nysius senecionis* (Schilling) (Hemiptera: Lygaeidae) feeding in large numbers on Guernsey fleabane**—On 22.ix.1998, whilst visiting a derelict site in Wandsworth, West London (VC17, 'Surrey'), I was startled by the abundance of Guernsey fleabane, *Conyza sumatrensis* (Retz.) E. Walker (Asteraceae). The site, on the River Thames at the outlet of the River Wandle (TQ253752), had previously been a storage facility for Shell, and the large circular concrete bases of the storage tanks were still present amongst the acres of rubble. The fleabane was growing out from almost every available crack and piece of bare ground. Thinking it might be a novel foodplant for some insect or other I swept a small patch and was rewarded by a sweep net crawling with about 200 specimens of a ground-bug, a *Nysius* species—both adults and nymphs. Beating other patches of the plant over the net confirmed that the insect was incredibly abundant. The *Nysius* was easily determined later as *N. senecionis*, using the description and figures given by Hodge & Porter (1997).

As its name suggests, *Nysius senecionis* is well known to feed on ragworts, *Senecio* species, and since the insect's discovery in Britain in 1992, it has been fairly widely recorded in south-east England on these common plants (Hodge, 1997; Kirby, 1997).

Guernsey fleabane is not unrelated to ragworts, but its use as a foodplant for the bug is a little surprising. What is even more surprising, however, is the amazing abundance of the bug on the fleabane at this site. It was not possible, in the limited circumstances of the visit, to make anything other than a rough guess of the bugs' numbers, but a few sweeps of the net produced easily over 100 specimens from a small patch of the foodplant. Several hundreds of thousands must be a conservative estimate of the insect's numbers at this site.